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ABSTRACT

In response to a need expressed by Kentucky teachers for curriculum guides as a very important priority that should be addressed to improve instruction and learning as part of the Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA), the study reported here was undertaken. The study investigated the extent to which the state documents and guidelines had been accessible and helpful, processes and products needed to provide teachers a clear understanding of Kentucky's learning goals and academic expectations, desired structure of documents that would provide guidance for curriculum design and development, and information teachers need on assessments. A qualitative research approach was used. A minimum of eight teacher focus group interviews were conducted; interviews were also conducted with Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) staff, including Regional Service Center (RSC) personnel. It was found that teachers and schools are currently at various stages of curriculum alignment, with many only just beginning alignment efforts. Most teachers reported that the materials to which they have access are not particularly user friendly. Teacher training opportunities for curriculum development and alignment were also found to be limited, of mixed quality, and lacking in sufficient time allotment. It was recommended that material distribution to teachers for their use should be made more user friendly and simpler to use; that a better method be found to facilitate and enhance communication between KDE and teachers; that professional development should be more focused and in-depth; and that in materials and training sessions, teachers should be made aware that curriculum alignment involves blending of old and new approaches to the teaching/learning process. Appendices provide: the focus group interview protocol; a list of materials designed for use in curriculum development; and questions for the RSC directors and consultants regarding support for curriculum design. (NAV)

ED 394 970

THE KENTUCKY INSTITUTE FOR EDUCATION RESEARCH

The Needs of Kentucky Teachers for Designing Curricula Based on Academic Expectations

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An Independent Study
conducted by
The Planning Research and Evaluation Unit
Appalachia Educational Laboratory
Charleston, WVA

for the
Kentucky Institute for Education Research
146 Consumer Lane, Frankfort, KY 40601

October 1995

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The Appalachia Educational Laboratory (AEL), Inc., works with educators in ongoing R & D-based efforts to improve education and educational opportunity. AEL serves as the Regional Educational Laboratory for Kentucky, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia and operates the Eisenhower Math/Science Consortium for these same four states. It also operates the ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools.

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PREFACE

This study was commissioned by the Kentucky Institute for Education Research to ascertain the needs of teachers with respect to curriculum development and implementation. A qualitative research approach was selected to assess these perceptions and address the research questions. Focus group interviews represent one useful technique used in such qualitative research. These interviews help to determine the perceptions, feelings, and manner of thinking of various groups.

Caution is in order, however, when employing this type of approach. While the methodology associated with qualitative research elicits rich, in-depth responses, this information may or may not be generalizable to a larger population. Thus, the conclusions in this document are not intended to represent the views of all teachers throughout Kentucky. They are, however, intended to accurately represent the views of the participants, who were selected as typical school practitioners. They are also intended to present a fair and balanced perspective on directions for improvement. These initial observations, conclusions, and recommendations should help Kentucky's educators and policy makers generate ideas for appropriate intervention to improve curriculum development, implementation, and alignment.

The reader is reminded that these data represent the perceptions of a number of professional educators involved in the curriculum process. No evaluative judgments about the performance of any individual, group, or agency are intended, nor should any be attributed to the conclusions or recommendations found in this report.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Teachers in a statewide telephone survey conducted for the Kentucky Institute for Education Research (KIER) in June and July of 1994 indicated the need to provide curriculum guides to teachers as one of the three most important priorities that should be addressed to improve instruction and learning as part of the Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA). As a result, KIER commissioned a study of the needs of teachers related to curriculum expectations; this document reports the findings of that study.

Purpose of the Study

The research questions addressed were:

- To what extent have the Valued Outcomes document *Transformations: Kentucky's Curriculum Framework*, and draft Content Guidelines been made available to teachers?
- To what extent have the Valued Outcomes document (Technical Report Part II), *Transformations: Kentucky's Curriculum Framework* and the draft Content Guidelines been helpful in providing guidance to design curricula (teaching and learning activities)?
- To what extent do teachers see the Academic Expectations, *Transformations*, and the Kentucky Instructional Results Information System (KIRIS) assessments as aligned and congruent?
- What processes and products are needed to provide teachers a clear understanding of Kentucky's Learning Goals and Academic Expectations?
- What should be the structure (parts and information) of documents that would provide guidance to teachers for designing curricula (teaching and learning activities)?
- What information do teachers need about the KIRIS assessments to assure them that their curriculum prepares students to perform well on the assessments and that the Academic Expectations and the KIRIS assessments are aligned?

The scope of work completed included the following:

- Conducting a minimum of eight focus group interviews, with at least one being held in each education region in Kentucky, to address the research questions of the study.
- Interviewing Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) staff, including Regional Service Center personnel.

- Analyzing and reporting findings.

- Offering specific recommendations that inform and support teachers in the design of curricula that address Kentucky's Academic Expectations and indicate how existing materials and curriculum documents can better be used by teachers and schools.

Conclusions

1. Teachers and schools are currently at various stages of curriculum alignment, with many schools just getting started in the process. This is in part due to one or more of the following:

   a. Many teachers are unclear about curriculum alignment in general and seem to have little understanding of the shift in belief systems that accompanies the process of aligning curriculum content and strategies, outcomes, and assessment.

   b. Many teachers need further clarification and specificity about the Academic Expectations to provide more direction for developing curriculum for specific grade levels.

   c. Many teachers are uncomfortable in developing curriculum at the local level without more specific guidance for each grade level because they are used to having the curriculum defined for them by textbooks and/or the state.

   d. Many teachers are frustrated and unsure of their efforts.

2. While teachers report they are using anything and everything they can get their hands on to redesign their curriculum, most teachers report the materials are generally not user friendly. As a consequence, teachers report the following:

   a. They generally feel they have access to curriculum materials, but that most of the materials are inadequate in that they are overwhelming and not focused.

   b. They do not know much about the Regional Service Centers and their materials and services they offer that might be of assistance to them in curriculum development.

3. Teachers generally report that training opportunities for curriculum development and alignment are limited and the quality is mixed. More specifically, teachers report the following:

   a. Time for training and development is lacking.

   b. The guidance and assistance from KDE is inadequate.

c. They are concerned about losing instructional days to professional development activities because they feel that their students' instructional needs are not being met if teachers are away.

d. Professional development opportunities need to be offered in new, more effective formats throughout the school year, not just at the beginning.

Recommendations

1. Material distributed to teachers for their use in curriculum alignment should be made more user friendly and as simple to use as possible. This includes:

   a. Expand and clarify the descriptions of key concepts of the Academic Expectations to provide teachers guidance in various content areas for curriculum design and development by grade level and/or school.

   b. Clarify through precise documentation the relationships between the Academic Expectations and the Kentucky Instructional Results Information System (KIRIS) assessments.

   c. Condense and simplify Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) materials (e.g., *Transformations*, Content Guidelines, etc.) into one document formatted to make the materials consistent so that teachers see clear connections between the different sets of materials and how they are to be used.

   d. Identify, describe, and disseminate exemplary curricula in schools that address Academic Expectations.

2. Since teachers generally believe they currently are not getting the information that is supposed to be directed to them, a method should be found to better facilitate and enhance communication between KDE and teachers. The roles of KDE, district personnel, and teachers with respect to curriculum development and alignment must be better defined and clarified.

3. Professional development for curriculum design and alignment should be more focused and in-depth. This should include such strategies as the following:

   a. The KDE, institutions of higher education, Regional Service Centers, and school consortia should collaborate and coordinate their efforts to build capacity for training and technical assistance in curriculum design.

b. Develop and use criteria for evaluating consultants and their services so that their performances can be effectively evaluated to provide appropriate quality control of consultants listed on state provider lists. One such criteria may include a finished product provided by the consultant for review by the KDE.

c. Develop and support a cadre of "coaches" to provide teachers specific ongoing technical assistance. This may include such products as videotapes of master teachers in action.

d. Develop and disseminate to teachers a catalog of services and materials available from the Regional Service Centers.

e. Assist local schools in the development and conduct of professional development opportunities for teachers using local professionals.

f. Develop and implement ways to provide professional development opportunities to teachers within the context of their normal work day.

g. The 1996 Kentucky General Assembly should continue the practice whereby local school boards are permitted to take up to five days for professional development.

4. In professional development materials and training sessions it should be demonstrated to teachers that curriculum alignment involves blending many things they have done before with new approaches to the teaching/learning process they are learning and trying to implement. More attention should be given to helping teachers blend what they know and have done in the past with new teaching and learning strategies: for example, how textbooks can be used for instruction, the use of a variety of old and new assessment strategies, the use of drill and practice in combination with the teaching of thinking and problem solving, and teaching of skills in combination with teaching of process.

INTRODUCTION

Need for the Study

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- Interviewing Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) staff, including Regional Service Center personnel.
- Analyzing and reporting findings.
- Offering specific recommendations that inform and support teachers in the design of curricula that address Kentucky's Academic Expectations and indicate how existing materials and curriculum documents can better be used by teachers and schools.

Contractor

The Planning, Research, and Evaluation unit of the Appalachia Educational Laboratory (AEL), Inc., was the successful bidder and on May 25, 1995, KIER contracted with AEL to conduct the study.

STUDY PROCEDURES

In addition to the original scope of work, AEL (a) conducted nine additional focus group interviews, (b) summarized data collected from Regional Service Center staff by Kentucky Institute for Education Research (KIER) staff, (c) conducted site visits to three schools that were described as having successful curriculum development experiences, and (d) reviewed Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) curriculum documents.

Focus Group Interviews with Teachers and Administrators

Teachers. At the request of KIER, the Kentucky Education Association (KEA), through their regional Uniserve directors, identified and invited teachers to participate in the focus group interviews. To the degree possible, a balanced group of elementary, middle, and high school teachers were contacted and assembled at a convenient site in each region of the state.

Administrators. Through the leadership of the Kentucky Association of Educational Supervisors, selected district supervisors of instruction were contacted by KIER to set up focus group interviews with elementary, middle, and high school principals and some district instructional supervisors. Area representatives arranged the focus group interviews and invited selected principals and instructional supervisors in his/her region to participate at a neutral meeting place.

A protocol developed by KIER and AEL staff (see Appendix A) was used to conduct the interviews. A handout which listed materials designed for use in curriculum development (see Appendix B) was also used during the focus group interviews. Table 1 describes the dates, locations, and participant role groups for each of the focus group interviews.

Interviews with KDE Staff

Interviews were conducted with seven KDE staff members from the Division of Curriculum and Assessment and from the Regional Service Centers.

Regional Service Center Surveys

A brief survey (see Appendix C) was administered by KIER staff to participants of a meeting of Regional Service Center directors and consultants.

Site Visits

Three site visits were conducted in schools that had been described by Kentucky's Commissioner of Education as having had positive curriculum experiences. The principals at each of the suggested sites agreed to be interviewed and to describe their particular curriculum experiences.

Table 1
Dates, Locations, Role Groups, and Number
Of Participants for Focus Group Interviews

Date	Location	Participants
6/7/95 AM	Barbourville	9 teachers 1 principal
6/7/95 PM	Somerset	4 principals 3 supervisors
6/8/95 AM	Lexington	3 principals 4 supervisors 3 resource teachers
6/8/95 PM	Bowling Green	3 principals 3 supervisors
6/9/95 AM	Murray	3 principals 3 supervisors
6/12/95 AM	Maysville	7 teachers 1 assistant principal
6/12/95 PM	Florence	11 teachers
6/13/95 PM	Louisville	9 teachers
6/14/95 AM	Paducah	8 teachers 1 principal
6/14/95 PM	Bowling Green	7 teachers
6/14/95 Evening	Bowling Green	10 G/T teachers
6/15/95 AM	Louisville	7 principals 5 administrators
6/16/95 AM	Morehead	4 principals 2 central office 2 teachers
6/16/95 PM	Florence	3 principals 4 central office
6/19/95 AM	Prestonsburg	1 principal 3 supervisors
6/19/95 PM	Prestonsburg	7 teachers

THE CONTEXT OF CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT IN THE COMMONWEALTH

History of Kentucky's Academic Expectations

The Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA) mandated that (1) schools require achievement on six Learning Goals, (2) the Council on School Performance Standards define the Learning Goals in measurable terms, and (3) the State Board for Elementary and Secondary Education implement a performance based accountability system for monitoring student achievement of the Learning Goals. In addition, the State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education was charged with assisting schools in continuously assessing student progress and to disseminate a model curriculum framework tied to the goals, outcomes, and the assessment strategies.

From July 1990 to November 1991, the Council on School Performance Standards, with the assistance of 125 professional educators, developed 75 Valued Outcomes. Each was defined by a rationale and related concepts and with example performance tasks and judging criteria. These were adopted in November of 1991 by the State Board of Elementary and Secondary Education and became the basis for the Kentucky Instructional Results Information System (KIRIS) and public school curricula.

During the first three years of KIRIS testing, more than 40 Valued Outcomes which focused on Learning Goals 1, 2, 5, and 6 were assessed. Many people expressed concern that the 75 outcomes were difficult to understand, and some community members voiced concern about teaching values and about the ability to measure them. As a result, the 1994 General Assembly voted not to assess Learning Goals 3 (self-sufficiency) and 4 (responsible group membership) and in March 1994 asked the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) to clarify the academic expectations for students. Therefore, the Commissioner of Education assigned KDE staff to state in simpler language the outcomes as academic expectations and to develop measurable expectations consistent with the original outcomes. Between early March and mid-April 1994, a cross-section of more than 175 people suggested ways to clarify the outcomes resulting in 57 Academic Expectations described in one-sentence statements (e.g., "Students make sense of the various things they observe").

Transformations: Kentucky's Curriculum Framework

KRS 158.6451 directed the KDE to design a curriculum framework which addressed goals, outcomes, and assessment strategies and provided curriculum direction to schools. By July 1993, the KDE produced a two-volume document, *Transformations: Kentucky's Curriculum Framework*, which offered explanations of the learner outcomes, suggested teaching strategies and activities, and resource lists. The *Transformations* document describes "the real curriculum" as "the one experienced by the student," and a curriculum framework as presenting "parameters to assist in the development of curriculum. It is not a curriculum guide, nor is it designed to be used as a tool for

the delivery of instruction. It can serve as a major resource for the creation of districts' and schools' curricula, instruction, performance assessment, and for professional development."

Volume I contains the goals and outcomes as well as their expansions with demonstrators, learning links, related concepts, teaching/assessment strategies, ideas for incorporating community resources, activities, and reflections. **Volume II** centers on the main processes used to develop curriculum and instruction and contains sections that address transforming the learning environment, alternative uses of school time, local curriculum development guides, bringing it all together, and resources.

Content Guidelines

A set of Content Guidelines used to help identify content related to the KIRIS assessment was drafted by the KDE and distributed in September 1994. The guidelines list content that, based on national standards, is considered "essential" within each of the subject areas and can be used to determine assessment benchmarks, to develop district curriculum development parameters, and to guide placement of certain topics and determine developmental appropriateness. The Content Guidelines do not delineate the specific content to be taught nor the sequence, both of which are in the domain of teachers and local curriculum-writing committees. Rather, the guidelines include descriptions or statements concerning the "essential" content, information regarding the sources used to establish the guidelines, in some content areas information regarding the percentage of the KIRIS assessment that would be devoted to specific accountability grade level assessments, and a response sheet for user feedback. The Content Guidelines were to remain in draft form for the 1994-1995 school year and were to be revised using feedback from educators employing the guidelines.

STUDY RESULTS

The findings reported below are based primarily on focus group interviews with teachers and administrators from the eight education regions of Kentucky. The ideas or concerns expressed frequently and/or agreed upon by a majority of participants have been summarized into major response themes. Illustrative quotes represent the diversity of responses to the questions asked.

Interviews with Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) personnel, a survey of Regional Service Center staff, and site visits to three schools provide secondary information regarding the research questions. Because of the varied duties and responsibilities of the KDE staff interviewed, no consistent set of questions was asked. However, the interview findings are summarized in narrative form reflecting the study research questions. The survey of the Regional Service Center staff is summarized in a general sense under the headings of the questions asked on the survey because items were left blank by some respondents. The site visit findings represent general impressions gleaned from the schools visited.

Teacher and Administrator Focus Group Interview Findings

Teachers and administrators who participated in the focus group interviews were asked a series of questions regarding curriculum development. These questions serve as headings for the summary of major response themes that follow. The number or length of illustrative comments should not be interpreted to indicate the degree of importance of any theme.

1. ***How clear are Kentucky's Academic Expectations to teachers in your school?***

   Major Response Theme #1.1 Teacher and administrator responses to this question generally indicated that the Academic Expectations were **not** very clear. Many interviewees indicated they thought of the Academic Expectations as "general" or school/community expectations rather than more specific expectations of what Kentucky students should know and be able to do.

   Illustrative comments:

   - "The way you are using expectation, you are just talking about general outcomes, right?"
   - "Are you talking about the state guidelines or are you talking about individual departments?"
   - "Not very clear, neither the first set nor the second set. I am not sure if the second set is distributed through my school."

Major Response Theme #1.2 The teachers and administrators interviewed in the focus group interviews stated almost universally that the Academic Expectations are not presented in a user-friendly format. The size and format of the *Transformations* document and Content Guidelines appear to be intimidating and overwhelming to many who attempt to use them. There was little unanimity of opinion among those interviewed regarding how best to achieve the Academic Expectations.

Illustrative comments:

- "I would say that my teachers have had difficulty adapting to that kind of format. They like content-specific statements, and just in all honesty, I just do not believe that we have done well with academic expectations."

- "The teachers sort of feel overwhelmed with them. I think they have a fairly good, basic understanding of the expectations that are there, but I am not sure that they feel like they really are providing the activities in the classroom that meet those expectations, and maybe their expectations are too high. Maybe they are trying to cover too many of the academic expectations in any one setting, or any one activity."

- "I think the Transformations document from the State was a little bit unwieldy and I don't think they've had enough time to really absorb that. I know schools are still at the awareness level with that document and it's going to take some time to really get it beyond that."

- "I think the teachers at my school are becoming more aware of them. The binder is so thick, the expectations are there, but unless you use the binder and get familiar with it...."

- "If there was one piece of information that we could have gotten that had the expectations condensed in one page, it would be more user friendly."

- "We have our curriculum framework guide which is a huge book. It is cumbersome to use on a daily basis and I think some of the things that are in it you sometimes question."

Major Response Theme #1.3 Many of the focus group interview participants indicated that each of the Academic Expectations made sense at face value but, upon closer examination, they were too general and not specific enough. Because of the perceived lack of specificity of the expectations, the interviewees generally indicated they did not know how to develop or present curriculum that would lead to students achieving the expectations as they are presently stated. Thus, it seems clarity of the Academic Expectations would be increased if greater specificity could be attained.

Illustrative comments:

- "I'd say the academic expectations themselves as they are written are clearly written, but there is a problem in that words can have many meanings and there are many interpretations. The result of that is you have 57 objectives and you can go into any teacher's classroom and take any lesson and map backwards to one of those."

- "Well, I think the expectations are pretty clear to all of us. We have written them and they are copied on to every page of the plan book, but I think the way to get there is what we are still looking for--the mechanics, the materials, the hands on."

- "I think clear as to what they are to achieve, but they are very broad and very general and I am not sure teachers know all the steps in order to accomplish those academic expectations. They understand, but they don't understand all of the skills and everything that is necessary to accomplish that objective. It is so broad."

- "I think they are very global in nature. I think the teachers understand where the state intentions are going; however, they are quite different than educational outcomes traditionally from the past and they are uncertain how to get there. They see the destination, but they don't have the road map."

Major Response Theme #1.4 The focus group interviews clearly revealed that there still exists general confusion over what the Academic Expectations are and how they are to be used. The frustrations the interviewees expressed indicated teachers are not comfortable with their ability to teach to the expectations or to assess the successful attainment of the expectations, perhaps because they do not understand them or perhaps because they do not know how to develop curricula to attain these goals, or both.

Illustrative comments:

- "Well I think there has been a lot of confusion about what is expected. I think in the beginning we needed more clear-cut answers than what we got."

- "On the secondary level there is a lot of confusion and sometimes I don't think it's been spelled out as to what are expectations in the different areas. We are just expected to be there but we haven't been told clearly what we really need to do."

- "I think there is mass confusion still all over the state."

2. ***To what extent does your school have a curriculum aligned with Kentucky's Academic Expectations?***

Major Response Theme #2.1 The teachers and administrators interviewed indicated that there was considerable variation in the extent to which teachers have aligned their curricula with the Academic Expectations. It appears that some teachers have done little, if any, alignment while others have made significant progress in developing their curricula to be consistent with the Academic Expectations.

Illustrative comments:

- "In my school there is very little knowledge now. We are becoming more familiar, especially with Transformations. We are currently in the middle of a curriculum audit to find out what we are teaching and how it lines up with what is expected. That I think will help."

- "We have been in the process of realigning our curriculum for about three years. We are just taking it a subject at a time, aligning it from K-12. It takes a long time to get it done."

- "I like the word conversation, that is pretty much where we are now. The conversation on what we are trying to do with curriculum alignment. For instance, the next 6 days members of my staff are trying to do curriculum alignment."

- "We are working on it. We've started down the path, but by no means have arrived."

3. ***What do teachers in your school use to design instruction focused on Kentucky's Learning Goals and Academic Expectations?***

Major Response Theme #3.1 Focus group participants generally responded that when teachers and administrators engage in curriculum development they use a potpourri of responses. *"Whatever I can get my hands on"* was a common response. Teachers generally described using a number of resources including the materials provided by the KDE, textbooks, scope and sequence guidelines, packaged curriculum, standardized tests, national standards, and professional association resources. They also observed that what "works" for one teacher may not "work" for another.

Illustrative comments:

- "It is a constant game, the time, getting the materials. They just have to get them any way they can."

- "We've used our old scope and sequence that we worked years and years to have. We don't see anything wrong with that, are proud that we had it. And surprisingly enough, it ties beautifully with the academic expectations and the transformation plan."

- "We are fortunate enough to be close to a university with those professors who can come in and help you out."

- "Everything and anything. They're pulling resources from textbooks, using kits, they're using everything."

- "To bring in not necessarily parents but the people out there in the business and industry and say what type of workers do you want and what do you want from your workers? There has to be a togetherness between the school and the community."

- "They use the CAT-5. The science standards, social studies standards, a big variety. We use anything we can get our hands on."

- "We just depend on teachers helping teachers. What works, what they have found to work, just sharing among themselves. What has been one of the greatest frustrations for my folks is finding materials. What has been one of the biggest challenges is the labor that has been involved really creating them because there isn't much out there in terms of prepared materials. It has been a real obstacle."

4. ***To what extent are the materials provided by KDE available to teachers? How useful do teachers find them? What would you suggest to make them better?***

Major Response Theme #4.1 The teachers and administrators who participated in the focus group interviews indicated that nearly all teachers had access to KDE materials. The teachers in the focus group interviews generally indicated that they had seen or used most of the materials provided by the KDE; the interviewees clearly indicated that access was not the issue.

Illustrative comments:

- "Most of the things on this list we have seen."

- "I think a lot of them are available but it is just a matter of being able to get to the point to go look at them and actually use them."

- "We have access to all of these things."

Major Response Theme #4.2 Focus group interview participants generally agreed that the KDE materials available could be used. However, they stated almost universally that the

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KDE materials were not user friendly. Materials were commonly perceived to be overwhelming, with there being simply too much material which is not tied together with clear directions as to how they should be used in the curriculum development process. The interviewees reported teachers found materials useful when they had guidance and the opportunity and time to work with them.

Illustrative comments:

- "Months and months go into documents like this and then in three hours you are supposed to know everything about it and be able to use it. I know we can't train for months and months, but if we could have some practical applications or modeling..."

- "The released open-ended items in the performance events are nice to use beforehand with the students."

- "I think we've got more of it than I've been able to use effectively because it does come so much. There is more of it than I can use like I need to use it. Of course, if it wasn't there I would be the first one fussing, saying I need it."

- "I have had some of this on the first few days thrown at me before school. Like 'this is what we have to be working on', that's it. File it away."

- "If you are going to give us content guidelines, give it to us at a meeting in which we have to stay for a little while and learn something about the content guidelines. Information is just a commodity. So when you provide us something, I think you need to provide it in a way that we separate commodities from skills."

Major Response Theme #4.3 The interviewees reported that the KDE materials were not very useful in some cases. While this may be a training issue (see question #5), the teachers interviewed complained that the materials were difficult to use in the time frames in which most teachers had to use them.

Illustrative comments:

- "KELP is a waste of time because we already do anecdotal things, we already keep working portfolios of projects, we take pictures. It takes an hour and a half per child. I don't have an hour and half per child."

- "A lot has been said of people in the State Department at very high levels and I just wish in their training they model what they expect us to do in the classroom. All I have seen is a videotape of someone sitting in a chair telling me in lecture form holding up an overhead."

Major Response Theme #4.4 The primary means to facilitate the use of KDE materials in the curriculum development process that was suggested by teachers and administrators interviewed in the focus group interviews was to provide more time. The comment of "more time" was often couched in terms of more time at school to work with colleagues in curriculum development and more time with KDE personnel who could provide more training, guidance, and direction.

Illustrative comments:

- "More professional development to understand this material."
- "We have been saying we are tired of being told what to do and we want some input to decide. Now we have been given that opportunity and now we are going back to 'just tell us what to do.'"

5. ***To what extent have teachers in your school had opportunities for training in the use of curriculum materials and documents?***

Major Response Theme #5.1 The interviewees reported that the KDE training they had received in the use of KDE materials was sometimes useful but many times it was not. The teachers complained that, at times, the training was too superficial or not on target and at times did not provide the specific guidance to teachers that is necessary to accomplish the curriculum development task they face. The teachers and administrators interviewed indicated that the quality of the trainers varied considerably, with some totally unable to provide meaningful, helpful training for teachers.

Illustrative comments:

- "We've had a great deficiency in training from the state department. We had Transformation Curriculum Framework training sometime back, but there has really been no training on how to use these."
- "The traditional complaint of teachers is when they go to in-service training they get a lot of irrelevant kinds of things. Lots of classroom teachers need some direction, they need some materials that they can actually come back and use in the classrooms. If the state can provide more of those kinds of materials or more chances for teachers to go get those materials."
- "I think one of the things that really irritates me as an educator is when the state comes in and shows us these handy dandy films and educate us. They would lose a classroom in five minutes. That is the most poor definition of teaching I have ever seen."

- "I would like to get some of the money they are spending on these people they are sending from the state department."

- "A resource that I think that we could use is more trained curriculum and assessment consultants from the state department that could give you the most current information."

Major Response Theme #5.2 The teachers and administrators interviewed in the focus group interviews related that there were many training opportunities available. They indicated that the issue was not the availability of training but rather the quality of the training that is available.

Illustrative comments:

- "A lot, but the quality has not always been there."

- "The most effective professional development activities have been done by our own."

- "Ours came from a former superintendent who was coming to do middle school curriculum alignment. We asked him if he would help by putting an example on the board; he could not do it. It was a big source of embarrassment and we almost walked out."

- "I have received some training that's a total waste of time, massively a waste of time and it is not better, basically than it was before."

- "I think the training should be relevant to what you are going to use in the classroom. You go sometimes and are bored to death."

- "Our system has had a variety and we started out with some of these consultants who knew less than we forgot."

- "Some of the best training we have had has been outside of the school environment through our own association because that is delivered from teachers."

- "I think the state department has offered many more opportunities in establishing a regional service center."

- "I think KET is another resource that certainly is available and we probably haven't taken advantage of it."

6. ***If you had unlimited funding to provide resources for teachers to help them align their curriculum and design day-to-day instruction related to the Academic Expectations and the KIRIS assessments, what resources would you provide for them?***

Major Response Theme #6.1 The focus group interview participants identified THE major resource that teachers need for curriculum development as TIME. The interviewees clearly indicated that TIME meant several different things: (a) more time to become familiar with curriculum materials, (b) more time to plan and work together with other teachers in developing curriculum materials, and (c) more time for professional development for in-depth training throughout the entire school year related to curriculum development and implementation.

Illustrative comments:

- "I don't think materials and resources are the issues. I think the time to utilize the resources and plan is the big issue."
- "Right up front, 12-month employment so they could work all summer on this."
- "An hour at least every day for common planning time."
- "I would like to see planning time over the summer for teachers to get together and plan units and to grade with other teachers in other subject areas."
- "I would like to teach four days and have one day to work on curriculum and planning. I would even teacher longer during the day if I had that fifth day to plan together while we are there and getting paid."
- "I think we need a longer school calendar that incorporates more professional development time both in terms of additional days and additional hours in the day, especially for planning. I think the single most important thing that impacts student learning is the time teachers spend in preparation."
- "I would pay full salaries in the summer for teachers to work together and research and design and experiment with things and to buy the materials they need. I would provide more money in professional development for travel for going to conferences outside the state."
- "If we are going to take on the responsibility of writing the curriculum as well as being trained to deliver it, then we need lots and lots of released time to do that because you don't function well when you are doing it after school or if you are doing it on Saturday."
- "I really think that we should be involved in some really meaningful conversation about curriculum."

Major Response Theme #6.2 The interviewees generally indicated that teacher time is a key to effective development and implementation of curricula. They commonly stated the concern that teachers need to be freed to develop curricula and teach and not be responsible for the many other things they are being asked to do. This concern was reflected in comments where the teachers and administrators interviewed suggested that (a) class size should be universally reduced, (b) there should be teacher aides in every classroom, and (c) paperwork should be reduced or clerical assistance provided.

Illustrative comments:

- "Reduce the class sizes."
- "I think reduced class size would help greatly. You can deal with 7 a lot better than you can with 25-30."
- "I would mandate no more than 15 students to a classroom."
- "I would provide a full-time assistant for every person."
- "There needs to be an aide in every class."
- "If you are going to have multi-age, and you are going to have 20 or more children in a classroom, every teacher needs an aide."
- "Elementary teachers need a secretary."
- "Some way to lighten the paper load so that we can actually focus on what we are supposed to be doing so that we can teach students."
- "I think that another thing that would help would be to have clerical support. We are doing so much stuff that is not teacher related. You have to do things for the district that they always needed yesterday and you are supposed to drop what you are doing."
- "You need a secretary."

Major Response Theme #6.3 The focus group interview participants indicated that professional development should be more in-depth and provided during the entire school year rather than just at the beginning of the school year. The participants clearly described professional development related to curriculum development and implementation as a major need.

Illustrative comments:

- "I think the problem is that we never reach a level of expertise. Even if you had it before, you never feel like you have accomplished anything."
- "With the language arts we have had so much training on portfolios and writing. But sometimes we don't get past the exploratory stage. We feel that we now need training in the finer points of how do you take this student who is almost at the next level. What is it that I need to do to get that student to the next level."
- "Maybe we need to get into that proficient category."
- "When a company develops a new product they take the time to study and develop for that one product. They also train their employees to produce that product at the maximum. I hope the state department has learned that the next time they go through something like this that they study it longer and give their employees proper training."
- "Schools need to provide a group of teachers with an extended amount of time and training. The next thing you have to do is give that team that wrote that curriculum time to deliver it to the rest of the teachers."
- "More training for teachers to feel comfortable with technology. We still have teachers that are not comfortable with technology."
- "I think it would be a good idea to plan days during the year and not just have all your professional development at the beginning of the summer."
- "A lot of the more extensive training offered through the year."
- "My sister-in-law teaches in another state and they have what they call administrative days. They are scattered throughout the year."

Summary of focus group interview findings. The teachers and administrators who participated in the focus group interviews generally indicated that the Academic Expectations of what Kentucky students should know and be able to do were not very clear and that many thought of them as "general" or school/community expectations. Further, they indicated that, while the Academic Expectations made sense at face value, closer examination revealed they were too general and not specific enough. The perceived lack of clarity of the Academic Expectations seems to be a major impediment to curriculum development because teachers are not sure what to teach or how to assess it. In addition, the relative lack of curriculum development by many teachers does not seem to be a function of not having appropriate development materials available but rather seems to be attributed

to what teachers perceive as not having enough time, quality training, and infrastructure (e.g., teachers aides) to accomplish the task.

Secondary Data Source Findings

Findings from Interviews with KDE Staff

Based on interviews of seven KDE staff to assess the current status of KDE curriculum materials and processes associated with curriculum development, it was determined that the staff believe the direction from the KDE regarding curriculum development and implementation is clearly delineated in KERA statutes. They stated that it is KDE's charge to produce and disseminate a model curriculum framework which is tied directly to the goals, outcomes, and assessment strategies. They further stated that the framework is to identify teaching and assessment strategies, instructional material resources, ideas on how to incorporate the resources of the community, a directory of model teaching sites, and alternative ways of using school time. Materials developed by the KDE to this point include *Transformations: Kentucky's Curriculum Framework*, Draft Content Guidelines, Draft High School Course outlines, the Primary Learning Descriptors, the Kentucky Early Learning Profile (KELP), information from the Galef Institute such as Different Ways of Knowing (DWOK), district learning results profiles, thematic instructional units, released open-ended items and performance events, mathematics and writing portfolio materials, unit of study development criteria, and a performance event design manual.

A second important role the KDE plays with respect to curriculum development is in the area of professional development. The KDE staff interviewed report that the KDE serves a facilitator rather than provider role with respect to curriculum development and implementation professional development opportunities, including KDE staff, local school consortia, the Regional Service Centers, Commonwealth Institutes, and Kentucky Educational Television (KET). The KDE is attempting to identify and make available to local schools an electronic database of effective, appropriate professional development opportunities. The KDE is also attempting to provide more professional development opportunities at the local level to enhance attendance, utility, and follow-through.

Summary of KDE interview findings. KDE staff clearly described the Department's approach to assisting local schools in developing curricula. Their role is to assist local schools by providing curriculum materials for local schools to use. Though not all materials are totally current or complete, the department continues to revise and develop materials for curriculum development.

KDE staff indicate that there are some communication problems both within the KDE and with local school districts. Some of the problems are logistical in nature and some resulted from the many concurrent innovations being incorporated as part of KERA.

Findings from Regional Service Center Staff Surveys

Nearly all of the Regional Service Center staff who responded to the survey indicated that teachers had access to the materials developed by the KDE as well as access to textbooks, national standards, thematic units, and materials from conferences/professional development opportunities. The key issue for them was the degree to which materials were distributed effectively and appropriately at the local level. They reported that teachers still seem to be experiencing difficulty using the materials and seeing how each piece fits into the total scheme of things.

The Regional Service Center staff surveyed indicated that time was the key factor in achieving effective curriculum development. Several suggestions for meeting this need were communicated, from lightening individual workloads by hiring more teachers to providing professional development opportunities that emphasized "hands-on" experience with appropriate modeling, guidance, and feedback. Nearly all of the respondents suggested that more professional development associated with the Learning Goals and Academic Expectations was needed. Professional development activities commonly mentioned were focused on curriculum alignment, portfolio analysis, integrating curriculum, use of the curriculum framework, collaborative teaching/teaming, and needs assessment.

Findings from Site Visits to Three Local Schools

As a result of suggestions from the Commissioner of Education, three site visits were conducted to collect information concerning the curriculum development experiences of three schools. These findings are not meant to be representative of curriculum experiences of all schools.

Site A. The principal and one science teacher from a high school that serves about 480 students in grades 7-12 with approximately 30 faculty members were interviewed. Both the principal and the science teacher suggested that one of the reasons for the success at their school was that teachers had developed a "sense of ownership" of curriculum. The school placed a priority on writing and devoted time to training and qualifying teachers to score portfolios. Furthermore, each teacher had a copy of the *Transformations* document, and time is devoted at departmental meetings to using the document to design curriculum. In addition, teachers received training on open-ended items and the development of prompts and questions. Both respondents indicated that having a small school with little faculty turnover as well as strong leadership are advantageous for curriculum development and other reform initiatives. They also indicated that the Academic Expectations and the Content Guidelines were too broad. Both also noted that the *Transformations* document was "overwhelming," but that the staff had invested much time and effort into understanding how to use the document.

When asked about the role of universities in curriculum development, both respondents indicated that universities need to be a resource for local schools and "they need to get on board with the curriculum frameworks." In addition, they suggested strongly that universities needed to accept

portfolio work as part of admission requirements for their students continuing on with a college education.

Site B. AEL staff interviewed the principal, a group of teachers, and one parent from an elementary school that serves approximately 527 students in grades K-6 with approximately 21 faculty members. The school embarked on a self-audit after identifying a discrepancy between scores on open-ended items and portfolios. The school staff undertook an intensive effort to become better trained in scoring portfolios and to learn how to use the assessment process to influence curriculum. Staff present at the meeting indicated that the Academic Expectations were too broad and that the Transformations and Content Guidelines were very broad.

Teachers indicated that they used lots of materials to develop curriculum. The materials included old scope and sequence materials, national standards, released open-ended items, curriculum planning maps, model units, and interdisciplinary units of study. Teachers noted that the learning results reports came much too late for them to be put to good use in planning and development.

Staff offered several suggestions for improvements with respect to curriculum development. They included:

- providing more time for planning;
- enhancing technology at the local level and with the KDE (downloading documents, information about upcoming professional development opportunities, etc.);
- "slowing down" the rate of change at the state level;
- sharing learning experiences among and between schools;
- providing professional development money for individual teacher needs;
- focusing on making the Academic Expectations more specific;
- having KDE staff and Higher Education work more collaboratively; and
- continuing to have opportunities for teacher input at the state level.

Site C. AEL staff interviewed the principal at an elementary school serving about 600 students in grades K-6 with approximately 19 faculty members. The principal indicated that the most important component associated with their curriculum alignment was that of a good, flexible staff not afraid of change and open to creative thinking. The principal also indicated that the school embarked on a school transformation plan before it was mandated.

Teachers in this school have received a great deal of professional development with regard to Academic Expectations beginning when they were written as learner outcomes. Not only does the school district provide a number of professional development activities, but the teachers share what they learn from those opportunities with each other on a regular basis. Training was mandatory for writing portfolios for all teachers. The school also received a grant to work on the development of open-response items. Teachers early on developed thematic units and continue to refine and share those units. Each lesson plan contains at least one performance event.

Summary of site visits. The most common elements to the success in curriculum development noted by teachers and administrators in these sites were time and staff commitment. Collaboration and a positive approach seem to be essential components for successful curriculum development. In addition, many tools were used to develop curriculum, including not only materials provided by the KDE, but those identified by teachers and administrators.

CONCLUSIONS

1. Teachers and schools are currently at various stages of curriculum alignment; many schools just getting started in the process. This is due, in part, to one or more of the following:

   a. Many teachers are unclear about curriculum alignment in general and seem to have little understanding of the shift in belief systems that accompanies the process of aligning curriculum content and strategies, outcomes, and assessment.

   b. Many teachers need further clarification and specificity about the Academic Expectations to provide more direction for developing curriculum for specific grade levels.

   c. Many teachers are uncomfortable in developing curriculum at the local level without more specific guidance for each grade level because they are used to having the curriculum defined for them by textbooks and/or the state.

   d. Many teachers are frustrated and unsure of their efforts.

2. While teachers report they are using anything and everything they can get their hands on to redesign their curriculum, most teachers report the materials are generally not user friendly. As a consequence, teachers report that:

   a. They generally feel they have access to curriculum materials, but that most of the materials are inadequate in that they are overwhelming and not focused; and

   b. They do not know much about the Regional Service Centers and their materials and services that might be of assistance to them in curriculum development.

3. Teachers generally report that training opportunities for curriculum development and alignment are limited and the quality is mixed. More specifically, teachers report:

   a. Time for training and development is lacking.

   b. The guidance and assistance from the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) is inadequate.

   c. They are concerned about losing instructional days to professional development activities because they feel that their students' instructional needs are not being met if they are away.

   d. Professional development opportunities need to be offered in new, more effective formats throughout the school year, not just at the beginning.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Material distributed to teachers for their use in curriculum alignment should be made more user friendly and as simple to use as possible. This includes:

   a. Expand and clarify the descriptions of key concepts of the Academic Expectations to provide teachers guidance in various content areas for curriculum design and development by grade level and/or school.

   b. Clarify through precise documentation the relationships between the Academic Expectations and the Kentucky Instructional Results Information System (KIRIS) assessments.

   c. Condense and simplify Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) materials (e.g., *Transformations*, Content Guidelines, etc.) into one document formatted to make the materials consistent so that teachers see clear connections between the different sets of materials and how they are to be used.

   d. Identify, describe, and disseminate exemplary curricula in schools that address Academic Expectations.

2. Since teachers generally believe they are currently not getting the information that is supposed to be directed to them, a way should be found to better facilitate and enhance communication between KDE and teachers. The roles of KDE, district personnel, and teachers with respect to curriculum development and alignment must be better defined and clarified.

3. Professional development for curriculum design and alignment should be more focused and in-depth. This should include such strategies as the following:

   a. The KDE, institutions of higher education, Regional Service Centers, and school consortia should collaborate and coordinate their efforts to build capacity for training and technical assistance in curriculum design.

   b. Develop and use criteria for evaluating consultants and their services so that their performances can be effectively evaluated to provide appropriate quality control of consultants listed on state provider lists. One such criteria may include a finished product provided by the consultant for review by the KDE.

   c. Develop and support a cadre of "coaches" to provide teachers specific ongoing technical assistance. This may include such products as videotapes of master teachers in action.

d. Develop and disseminate to teachers a catalog of services and materials available from the Regional Service Centers.

e. Assist local schools in the development and conduct of professional development opportunities for teachers using local professionals.

f. Develop and implement ways to provide professional development opportunities to teachers within the context of their normal work day.

g. The 1996 Kentucky General Assembly should continue the practice whereby local school boards are permitted to take up to five days for professional development.

4. In professional development materials and training sessions it should be demonstrated to teachers that curriculum alignment involves blending many things they have done before with new approaches to the teaching/learning process they are learning and trying to implement. More attention should be given to helping teachers blend what they know and have done in the past with new teaching and learning strategies: for example, how textbooks can be used for instruction, the use of a variety of old and new assessment strategies, the use of drill and practice in combination with the teaching of thinking and problem solving, and teaching of skills in combination with teaching of process.

Appendix A

Focus Group Interview Protocol

KIER ADMINISTRATOR FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Introduction

Good morning/afternoon! My name is _____ and assisting me is _____. I work with the Appalachia Educational Laboratory in Charleston, WV. The Kentucky Institute for Education Research has contracted with us to talk with teachers and administrators across the Commonwealth about curriculum issues in Kentucky. Our discussion today will address your concerns and needs with regard to designing and implementing curriculum.

Before we begin, I need to establish a few ground rules. First, our discussion will be tape recorded because I will not be taking notes during our discussion and may want to recall something said. Because of the recording, please speak clearly and I'll try to encourage only one speaker at a time. _____ will be taking notes as we talk so that in the event the tape recorder malfunctions, she/he can help me remember what was said. We would like for you to speak honestly and candidly with respect to the questions I will pose to you. Everything that you tell us will remain anonymous and only be used in summary form. Only AEL staff and the staff of KIER will listen to the tapes, if at all, for reporting purposes.

While time is short today, it is important that everyone has an opportunity to express their concerns and share their experiences. It will be my job to insure that everyone who has something to say has that opportunity. There are no right or wrong answers. No one in the group, including me, is to be considered the expert on anything that we talk about. Therefore, please do not judge one another's opinions; everyone's opinion is equally important. If you need clarification of any of the questions, please feel free to ask.

Finally, we will not be taking a formal break today. Please feel free, however, to take a stretch or use the restroom. If you need to do so, the restrooms are located _____. Should you need to leave the table, please do so as quietly as possible.

Are there any questions? With those guidelines in mind, let's begin!

First, please briefly introduce yourself.

1. How clear are Kentucky's Academic Expectations to teachers in your school?

2. To what extent does your school have a curriculum aligned with Kentucky's Academic Expectations?

3. What do teachers in your school use to design instruction focused on Kentucky's learning goals and Academic Expectations?

4. The Department of Education has provided a series of documents to schools related to the Academic Expectations. (SEE LIST) To what extent are these materials available to teachers?

5. To what extent have teachers in your school had opportunities for training in the use of curriculum materials and documents?

6. If you had the ability to provide resources to teachers in your school to help them align their curriculum with Kentucky's Academic Expectations and the KIRIS assessments, what resources would you provide for them?
[PROBE FOR: Information, Materials, External training and technical assistance, Local (district/school)]

7. If you had the ability to provide resources to teachers in your school to help them design "day to day" instruction related to the Academic Expectations and the KIRIS assessments, what resources would you provide for them?
[PROBE FOR: Information, Materials, External training and technical assistance, Local (district/school)]

8. Is there anything else you would like to tell us, or are there things we forgot to ask?

Appendix B

Materials Designed For Use in Curriculum Development

Transformations: Kentucky's Curriculum Framework

Content Guidelines distributed by KDE

Textbooks/Instructional Materials
(Instructional Materials Showcases)

Instructional units
(PRISM)
(Model Units)

Released open-ended items and performance events

Writing portfolio teacher handbook and related materials

Mathematics portfolio teacher handbook and related materials

Portfolio scoring analysis

High school course outlines

Primary learning descriptions and KELP materials

School learning results reports

Appendix C

Questions for RSC Directors and Consultants
Regarding Support for Curriculum Design

Questions for RSC Directors and Consultants Regarding Support for Curriculum Design

A. Nearly all teachers B. 2/3 or more teachers

C. 1/3 or more teachers D. Less than 1/3 teachers

1. What materials do teachers in your region have available to them to design curricula related to Academic Expectations?

2. What materials do teachers in your region use to design curricula? What materials do the most successful teachers use?

3. When teachers and principals ask for assistance in the design of curricula what materials, and what professional development experiences do you recommend?

4. What do teachers need to design curricula to addresses the Learning Goals and Academic Expectations that *presently is not available to them*?

5. If you had 2 million dollars to spend in your region in the next year to improve long term learning results with respect to Kentucky's Learning Goals and Academic Expectations what resources would you provide?

6. If you were given total responsibility for curriculum and assessment in your region what would you do to insure that the Academic Expectations, the school curriculum and the assessments were aligned and congruent?

2A. To what extent are the following materials being used to design curricula?

A. Transformations Documents

B. Content guidelines distributed by KDE

C. Textbooks

D. Purchased instructional units (e.g. PRISM)

E. Released open-ended items and performance events

F. Writing portfolio teacher handbook and related materials

G. Mathematics portfolio teacher handbook and related materials

H. Portfolio scoring analysis

I. High school course outlines

J. Primary learning descriptions and KELP materials

K. School learning results reports